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Research Methods In Abnormal Psychology

Psychology is, like any science, a branch of knowledge that deals with a body of facts systematically arranged and shows the operation of general laws.

In all sciences, including psychology, a special procedure, the scientific method, must be used to collect data to answer a question or to solve a problem. The scientific method not only answers the question at hand but also is used to construct scientific theories. A theory is systematically organized knowledge applicable in a wide variety of circumstances

Descriptive Research

Any scientific process begins with description, based on observation, of an event or events, from which theories may later be developed to explain the observations. In psychology, techniques used to describe behavior include case studies, surveys, naturalistic observation, interviews, and psychological tests.

Case Studies

A case study is a method of obtaining information from the detailed observation of an individual or individuals. Much information about behavior and mental processes has been obtained through such studies of individual clinical cases.

Although valuable information about certain types of problems may be obtained by this method, the procedure is time consuming, and it is difficult to obtain data from a broad sampling of people.

Evaluation

Surveys

In a survey, people from a wide sample are asked questions about the topic of concern.

Surveys can supply useful information, but they have their problems and limitations. For example, the people who respond may not be representative of the population in general, or those polled may be reluctant to respond to questionnaires or to answer them accurately.

Survey evaluation

Naturalistic Observation

In another approach to gathering information, naturalistic observation, people or animals are observed in their everyday behaviors, and their behaviors of interest are documented. For example, valuable information on wild animals, such as lions, has come from studying them in their natural habitats as opposed to observing them in a zoo because their zoo behavior may be quite different from their natural behavior. Similarly, the behavior of a human in a home environment may differ considerably from that in a laboratory.

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PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTING

Many standardized procedures (tests) have been developed to measure specific behaviors or characteristics of organisms. Most of us have been subjected to such tests—for example, the intelligence, aptitude, and achievement tests used to predict behaviors. To be useful, tests must be both reliable and valid.

CORRELATION RESEARCH

Correlation, a statistical measure of a relationship between two or more variables, gives an indication of how one variable may predict another. The descriptive techniques discussed above permit a statement, in the form of correlations, about that relationship. However, correlation does not imply causation; that is, simply because two events are in some way correlated (related) does not mean that one necessarily causes the other.

EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH

If researchers intend to make cause-and-effect statements, they typically use experimental research, which is usually, but not always, conducted in a laboratory. The laboratory environment allows the experimenter to make controlled observations using the steps of the scientific method.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations are taken into account when an experiment is planned. In most academic institutions, the proposed experimental protocol is reviewed by an institutional review board to ensure that experimental procedures are appropriate (if they are not, federal funds will not be granted for the research). In dealing with human subjects, psychologists follow a code of ethical principles published by the American Psychological Association, which requires investigators to:

- → obtain informed consent from all subjects
- → protect subjects from harm and discomfort
- → treat all experimental data confidentially
- → explain the experiment and the results to the subjects afterward

Similarly, when research is conducted with animals, the project is reviewed by an institutional animal care and use committee to be certain that it is necessary to use animals as subjects to test the hypotheses and that other procedures are not feasible. It also determines that appropriate sample sizes and procedures are used in the experiment and that animals will be given proper care. The committee also periodically visits all of the animal colonies to ensure that the research animals are appropriately cared for.

Reference:
www.cliffsnotes.com
http://home.earthlink.net/~andyda/psych/methods/methods.html

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